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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to develop and pilot a needs assessment instrument that could be used to identify teacher inservice programs of value to specific Mississippi school districts. A survey of the literature led to the identification of 82 relevant items; a content validity check resulted in reduction of the list to 66 needs assessment items. These items were reproduced on an instrument to be used to gather teacher perceptions regarding the success of past inservice programs. Teachers were asked to respond to each item in terms of their perception of the importance of the item for teacher inservice programs. Then they were asked to indicate, on a scale from 0 to 4, the importance they perceived that their prior inservice programs had given to the item. The two types of responses were weighted against each other. Three elementary, two junior high, two high schools, and one vocational-technical center were involved in the pilot study. Items were ordered according to priority. Seventeen items were identified as priority needs of the eight-school district for future inservice programs. The 66 needs index summaries by school are tabulated; and priority needs, medium needs, and lower level needs of the school district are listed. (TJH)

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PILOT TESTING OF A NEEDS ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT IN A MISSISSIPPI SCHOOL DISTRICT

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PILOT TESTING OF A NEEDS ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT IN A MISSISSIPPI SCHOOL DISTRICT

The primary purpose of this study was to develop and pilot a needs assessment instrument which could be used to identify potential teacher inservice programs that might be of value to particular school districts during ensuing years. In Mississippi, for school accreditation purposes, a school district must minimumly provide a designated number of hours of inservice for its teachers and other employees. Furthermore, for Mississippi teachers to remain certified to teach from year to year, they must accumulate a designated number of inservice credits annually. Because this study was delimited only to the inservice needs of classroom teachers, principals and other administrators were thus excluded, as were custodians, bus drivers, etc.

A survey of current literature led the researchers to the identification of 82 potential items that seemed to have possible relevance for the purpose espoused. Some of the 82 items, upon closer examination, had little or no relevance for current inservice requirements and some were reduced through combining and/or rewording similar items. Through a content validity check, the 82 items were then reduced to 66. These items were then reproduced on an instrument which would be used to gather teacher perceptions regarding the success of past inservice programs in meeting the needs specified.

Readers are strongly cautioned at this point to consider the significant point that this instrument was developed from items mentioned in national literature rather than specifically from the goals and purposes espoused by the state of Mississippi or from any one or more school districts in that state. Consequently, any evaluation of the pilot district based upon this research should be interpreted in light of items reflecting common goals and purposes. However, considering the newness of Mississippi's inservice programs and the tentativeness of this research, the researchers strongly caution against any evaluative conclusions which could be made at this time. Additionally, there were strong events which had just occurred in the district which most assuredly resulted in abnormal results.

One of the researchers trained approximately ten teachers in the district, at least one at each school site, in the proper techniques for administering the instrument. The instrument was administered first at a target school in order to identify and correct problems with instructions and also to assure that item interpretation was clear. Some, but not all, teachers who were to administer the instrument at other schools were present for the first administration. Eventually, however, all survey administrators were individually trained in technique, were provided likely teacher questions, were provided appropriate responses, practiced administration, and reported that they could administer the survey. Subsequently, the instrument was administered at three elementary schools, two junior highs,

two high schools, and one vocational-technical center within the district. Although the district was interested in examining district "needs" rather than individual school "needs," the researchers suspected that individual school needs might be very different. If such were the case, then it could only be determined if responses were coded by individual school; consequently, all responses were so coded. For further research purposes, other demographic data were also secured.

The instrument was designed to obtain two perceptions of each teacher regarding each of the 66 needs assessment items. First, teachers were asked to respond to each item in terms of their perception of the importance of the item for teacher inservice programs; this is the theoretical or "should" part of their perceptions. Then they were asked to indicate the importance they perceived that their prior inservice programs had given to the item; this is the "gave" column on the instrument. In each case responses could range from a low of 0 (minimum or no attention) to a high of 4 (maximum attention).

For data analysis purposes, the "should" column values were subtracted from the "gave" column values; in other words, the value of interest to the researchers was the difference obtained as a result of "gave" minus "should" values. This technique resulted in the psychologically-acceptable principle of negative differences indicating "gaps" between what was and what should have been; this, in turn, could be interpreted as identified or potential

"needs" that should be addressed in future inservice programs. On the other hand, zero (or near zero) differences indicated that past inservice programs had appropriately addressed the item, and greater positive values indicated that the item was unnecessarily or perhaps overly addressed in past inservice programs. Results of the needs assessment survey appear in the following tables.

Table 1, entitled "Needs Index Summaries by School," designates the eight schools in this district by the numerals 1-8. The first column (numbered vertically from 1 to 66) indicates each of the the 66 items to which teachers were to respond. Under the columns designating each school are found the gaps or "needs" at each school for each of the 66 survey items. The largest gap (or indication of need) can only occur when most teachers at a school perceived that a designated item should have received a large amount of attention in their past inservice programs but had received little or no attention. In this case there is a need index of 4; lesser variations, of course, result in increasingly smaller needs indexes. When the attention which should have been given and which was given are roughly equivalent, then the needs index is zero.

Needs indexes are represented here only as whole numbers. Although item values for each column ("should" and "gave") were indicated on computer printouts as decimal values, differences of less than .50 between paired column values were recorded in this table as zeros, those of .51 to 1.49 as 1, 1.50 to 2.49 as 2, etc. While this technique

simplifies the table immensely, it undeniably leads to the possibility of a few inappropriate column and row sums in Table 1.

There is probably a great desire on the part of many readers to examine the column sums at the bottom of Table 1 and make conclusions regarding the school leadership at each of the eight schools. Perhaps if the instructions and the instrument were perfected (which they aren't) and the external factors at each school were equivalent (which they weren't), one could address that consideration. However, at the time these data were collected, there were uncontrollable factors at work in several schools which would obviously skew any such interpretations. Therefore, readers should in this case not infer that lesser column scores resulted from good inservice leadership by a principal, nor should they infer the contrary.

In the column at the extreme right of Table 1 are found the total need indexes for the district on each of the 66 items. Item 49, whose sum is 1, is totally omitted from discussion in this paper. In determining the cutoff points for the priority, medium, and lesser needs which should be addressed in this district's future inservice programs, the following criteria were used. A priority need was defined to have a total district score of 15 or greater; this was determined by multiplying the number of schools (8) by a needs index of 2, which results in 16, and then subtracting 1. Thus row totals of 15 or higher were considered to be indicative of items which should be given strong

consideration in future inservice programs. At the other extreme, row totals of 9 (8 times a needs index of 1, plus 1) or less were considered indicative of items which should be given some consideration but which teachers did not perceive to be significantly important needs. Finally, those row totals of 10 to 14 were considered indicative of medium importance in future inservice programs.

Table 2 presents the 17 items which have been designated at priority needs of the district for future inservice programs. They tend to range from items which allow teachers to accumulate inservice credit through individual efforts to learning ways to assist their students in performing better academically. These items tend to reflect the desires of experienced and reasonably competent teachers to exercise more control over their long-term careers and over the long-term learning of their students.

The items represented in Table 3 continue part of the theme of Table 2 but seem to reflect more immediency in many of the events portrayed. Table 4, on the other hand, seems to represent a collection of mundane elements that tend to be on-going and which occur yearly for brief periods of time prior to or near the beginning of each school year primarily. In comparison, the priority items in Table 2 seem more like goals for which teachers aim on a long-term basis but which often prove to be extremely unreachable. The conflict of these conclusions appears in Table 4 and in the verbal and written comments by teachers following the administration of the survey. For item sum 8 (item 46),

item sum 7 (item 55), and item sum 7 (items 14 and 56), one might conclude that the teachers really want no part of being or becoming more professional. A comment often heard in regard to item 55, specifically, was that teachers wanted no part of this because it would just add to the workload already piled on. Perhaps these teachers need to consider that being professional not only brings increased benefits and privileges, it also brings greater duties and responsibilities.

In regard to future use of the survey instrument that was used to obtain the data in this study, several important considerations came to light. First, in an attempt to simplify the items and keep them as brief as possible, several were shortened by omitting repetitive phrases. As a consequence, teachers became confused on some items as to whether the benefactors of the item were to be the teachers or the students (i.e., item 45). Another extremely pertinent comment was in regard to the frame of reference one should assume in responding to the items. Is one to assume to be responding from a personal standpoint, from the standpoint of a typical teacher in that school, or from the standpoint of a typical teacher within the district? The authors recommend that it be from the standpoint of a typical teacher in that teacher's school. This approach should lead to better inservice programs by school and by district.

TABLE 1: NEEDS INDEX SUMMARIES BY SCHOOL

	SCHOOLS								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	TOTAL
1.	2	3	2	1	2	2	1	2	15
2.	1	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	6
3.	1	2	1	1	0	1	0	1	7
4.	2	2	2	2	1	2	0	3	14
5.	1	1	2	1	1	2	0	0	8
6.	1	2	2	1	1	2	0	1	10
7.	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	2	8
8.	1	2	1	1	2	2	0	0	9
9.	3	3	2	2	2	3	0	2	17
10.	4	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	9
11.	3	2	2	1	2	2	0	2	14
12.	4	2	2	1	2	2	0	0	13
13.	2	2	2	1	1	2	0	1	11
14.	0	2	1	1	1	1	0	0	6
15.	2	2	2	1	2	2	0	2	13
16.	4	2	2	2	2	3	2	3	20
17.	2	2	2	1	1	2	0	2	12
18.	1	2	2	1	1	2	0	1	10
19.	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	14
20.	2	3	2	0	1	2	0	1	11
21.	2	2	2	2	3	3	1	1	16
22.	3	2	2	1	3	2	1	2	16
23.	2	3	2	1	4	3	1	2	18
24.	3	3	2	1	4	3	1	2	19
25.	2	2	2	1	2	2	0	1	12
26.	1	2	1	1	2	2	0	0	9
27.	2	2	1	1	2	1	0	1	10
28.	1	2	1	1	1	2	0	1	9
29.	1	2	1	1	1	2	0	0	8
30.	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	1	9
31.	1	2	1	1	1	2	0	0	8
32.	1	2	2	2	1	3	1	2	14
33.	1	3	2	2	2	2	0	2	14
34.	2	3	2	1	2	2	0	2	14
35.	2	3	3	2	2	3	1	3	19
36.	2	3	2	2	2	2	0	1	14
37.	2	2	2	2	1	2	0	2	13
38.	2	3	2	1	2	3	1	1	15
39.	1	2	1	1	0	1	0	1	7
40.	0	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	5
41.	1	3	1	1	2	2	1	0	11
42.	1	3	1	1	2	2	1	0	11
43.	0	1	1	1	2	2	0	0	7
44.	2	3	2	1	1	2	1	2	14
45.	2	3	2	2	2	2	1	2	16
46.	0	2	2	1	1	1	0	1	8
47.	1	2	2	1	1	2	0	1	10
48.	0	2	2	1	1	2	0	2	10
49.	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
50.	3	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	14
51.	2	3	2	1	2	3	1	1	15
52.	2	2	2	1	0	2	0	1	10
53.	0	1	2	1	1	1	0	0	6
54.	2	3	2	1	2	3	1	2	16
55.	1	2	1	1	0	2	0	0	7
56.	1	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	6
57.	2	1	2	1	1	2	0	0	9
58.	2	2	2	1	1	2	0	1	11
59.	2	1	2	1	0	2	0	0	8
60.	3	3	3	2	2	2	1	4	20
61.	4	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	17
62.	2	2	2	1	2	2	0	0	11
63.	3	3	2	1	3	3	1	4	20
64.	1	2	1	0	1	2	0	2	9
65.	1	3	3	1	2	2	1	2	15
66.	2	3	2	1	2	2	1	2	15
TOTALS BY SCHOOL	111	143	114	75	98	126	23	81	773

TABLE 2: PRIORITY NEEDS OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Item Sum	Item #	Item Wording
20		
	16.	increase teacher morale?
	60.	allow in-service credit for professional reading?
	63.	allow in-service credit for development of materials?
19		
	24.	assist students to improve homework performance?
	35.	increase teacher knowledge of computer-assisted instruction?
18		
	23.	assist students to better utilize study time?
17		
	9.	increase teacher input into curriculum decisions?
	61.	allow in-service credit for "master teacher" observations?
16		
	21.	assist students to become better test-takers?
	22.	assist students to become better note-takers?
	45.	assist remediation of written and/or language deficiencies?
	54.	offer practical solutions to teachers' problems?
15		
	1.	reduce discipline problems?
	38.	increase solutions of school problems through teacher ideas?
	51.	meet needs identified by classroom teachers?
	65.	encourage the development of computer-assisted instruction?
	66.	increase teacher perceptions of themselves as professionals?

TABLE 3: MEDIUM NEEDS OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Item Sum	Item #	Item Wording
14	4.	encourage better parent-school relations?
	11.	increase teacher skills in test construction?
	19.	increase school spirit and pride in teachers?
	32.	induct new teachers and student teachers into the school system?
	33.	increase teacher knowledge of educational issues and trends?
	34.	increase teacher knowledge of research in education?
	36.	increase teacher development of teaching materials used?
	44.	assist teachers in developing a classroom management plan?
	50.	meet needs identified by students and/or parents?
13	12.	reduce student tardiness?
	15.	increase teacher reading of professional literature?
	37.	increase teacher utilization of audiovisuals?
12	17.	encourage more contact between teachers and parents?
	25.	assist students to better understand rules and regulations?
11	13.	reduce student absence?
	20.	reduce unnecessary disruption during instructional time?
	41.	encourage teacher innovations of instructional tools?
	42.	increase subject matter knowledge of teachers?
	58.	encourage individual and/or small group instruction?
	62.	encourage meaningful follow-ups of in-service programs?
10	6.	encourage teacher-teacher relations?
	18.	recognize/publicise teacher accomplishments/ contributions?
	27.	assist teachers in becoming better motivators of students?
	47.	encourage awareness of national and world-wide events?
	48.	encourage awareness of local and state events?
	52.	meet needs identified by persons other than teachers?

TABLE 4: LOWER LEVEL NEEDS OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Item Sum	Item #	Item Wording
9	8.	model good teaching (demonstrations, films, skits, etc.)?
	10.	decrease student dropouts?
	26.	apprise teachers of letter-grade distributions?
	28.	promote a school atmosphere for encouraging learning?
	30.	increase teacher/student learning in regard to BSAP?
	57.	encourage solution to problems individually by building?
	64.	encourage video-taping and self-critiquing by teachers?
8	5.	encourage better teacher-student relations?
	7.	encourage the use of more teaching methodologies?
	29.	increase teacher/student performance in regard to IMP?
	31.	increase student performance (11th grade competency test)?
	46.	encourage teacher participation in teacher associations?
	59.	clarify school rules and regulations for teachers?
7	3.	encourage better teacher-principal interaction?
	39.	increase image of principals as instructional managers?
	43.	prepare teachers for the annual evaluation by the principal?
	55.	encourage local teachers to present in-service programs?
6	2.	increase "time-on-task" for instruction?
	14.	increase teacher perception regarding professionalism?
	53.	meet non-school (hobbies, advice, etc.) needs for faculty?
	56.	encourage active (not passive) participation by teachers?
5	40.	increase teacher-principal rapport?